

In Recital:
Matthew Parsons, Trumpet

With Special Guests:
Roger Admiral, Piano
Ashley Rees, Soprano

March 20, 2012, 8:00 PM
Lendrum Mennonite Brethren Church

“Let the Bright Seraphim” from *Samson* (1743)

George Frederic Handel (1685-1759)

*Ashley Rees, Soprano
Roger Admiral, Piano*

Trumpet Concerto (1948)

Henri Tomasi
(1901-1971)

Roger Admiral, Piano

Intermission

Trumpet Concerto in E Major (1803) Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778-1837)

Roger Admiral, Piano

Cascades (1980)

Allen Vizzutti
(1952-)

This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of a Bachelor of Music degree for Mr. Parsons.

The Fanfare Idea

Matthew Parsons

When I first took up the trumpet in Grade Four, my mother assumed that I had condemned myself to playing nothing but fanfares for as long as I stuck with the instrument. Twelve years later, it turns out that she was more or less correct.

Let me explain.

The initial entry of the trumpet in Handel's aria "Let the Bright Seraphim", from *Samson*, begins with an arpeggio from the lower register of the instrument to the mid-high register, where it continues with diatonic passages and trills. This phrase basically outlines the capabilities of the sixteenth-century natural trumpet for which the part was written. Composers were obliged to limit their writing for the trumpet to the pitches of the overtone series. But, while Handel had no choice but to write fanfare-like, arpeggiated lines in his writing for the trumpet, he and his peers set a precedent for later composers that has long outlasted the natural trumpet. This precedent will henceforth be referred to as the "fanfare idea".

Anton Weidinger's invention of the five-keyed trumpet in 1792 blew the possibilities open for brass music. Although the sound of the instrument lacked the power of its keyless predecessors, the trumpet could now play all of the notes of the chromatic scale. One would think, then, that it had been liberated from the constraints of overtone series-centric writing. However, as the concerto that Johann Nepomuk Hummel wrote for Weidinger demonstrates, the fanfare idea remained an integral part of the trumpet's musical identity. Hummel's concerto builds on an earlier one by Franz Joseph Haydn, also written for Weidinger. Both of these works acknowledge the established conventions of the natural trumpet, while exploring the new, keyed instrument's capabilities in playful ways. This juxtaposition comes to a head in the Hummel concerto at a point in the first movement, where an E minor arpeggio immediately follows an E major arpeggio. In the mid-low register of an E natural trumpet, the latter would have been impossible. Knowing this, it becomes obvious that Hummel's use of the new instrument's capabilities is remarkably subtle. It is not, however, the total refutation of brass convention that might be expected from a work for a new instrument. The fanfare idea, prominent since Handel and before, is extensively displayed throughout.

By the time Henri Tomasi composed his trumpet concerto, the keyed trumpet and the natural trumpet (which had enjoyed enduring popularity for its superior resonance) had both faded into obscurity, to be replaced by instruments with piston

valves, a French invention by François Périnet in 1838. Tomasi and his French peers, writing for the trumpet players of the Paris Conservatoire, took full advantage of the new lyrical capabilities of piston valve trumpets, which inherited both the power of the natural trumpets and the flexibility of Weidinger's keyed trumpet. The modern trumpet suited Tomasi's sensibilities well; its ability to play with deep lyricism is well matched with his melodic writing, and its flexibility accommodates his post-Debussy tonal idiom. And yet, for all of this, Tomasi chose to begin his concerto with a declamatory, unaccompanied trumpet call.

This act on Tomasi's part is an indication of a larger phenomenon in the history of trumpet literature: regardless of the advancements in the trumpet's capabilities, the popular concept of the instrument is fundamentally linked to the properties of pre-Weidinger brass instruments and, by extension, to the fanfare idea.

There are, of course, many exceptions, notably the late nineteenth/early twentieth-century cornet virtuoso tradition. The music composed and performed by Jean-Baptiste Arban and Herbert L. Clarke consciously steered away from trumpet-centric ideas, in favour of lyricism and fast, legato solo lines. This music established piston valve instruments as both descended from and independent from their historical predecessors.

If one were to search for a definitive modern incarnation of this tradition, one could do worse than to choose Allen Vizzutti. His playing finds the virtuosity of Arban and Clarke tempered and distorted by the cigarette smoke haze of jazz, but his peerless technical prowess and his ability to write music that suits his own facility clearly hearkens back to those two icons. *Cascades*, for solo trumpet, is based on repetitive patterns and jazz-inflected scalar runs. The fanfare idea is conspicuously absent.

And what a relief that is, because otherwise, my mother's fatalistic prediction of twelve years ago would have been entirely accurate.

The two halves of this recital each comprise one modern piece for piston trumpet, and one piece that was written centuries ago for an older instrument. None of these pieces is any more or less idiomatic and definitive of the trumpet than any other.